



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Responding Peacefully to Free Expression

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 9, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let's be very clear: the United States views the cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed as a terrorist as extremely offensive to Islam, and indeed extremely offensive to the value of respect for all religions that this organization champions. And let's be very clear again: we recognize that in a free society people have the right to express views even when they are deeply offensive and just plain wrong.

Those who disagree have the right to condemn the cartoons, but the condemnations should be peaceful. The non-violent demonstrations advocated by the late Martin Luther King, Jr., should be the example. The United States has always advocated and strongly supports the commitment participating States undertook in the Ljubljana Tolerance Decision to speak out against manifestations of hate. The key word here is *speak*, not hate.

We urge governments and civil society leaders to take measures now to lower tensions and prevent violence, and seize the opportunity to promote better understanding of the issues of personal freedom, press responsibility and religious sensitivity that this episode has highlighted.

We commend the responsible statements in recent days by leaders such as Danish Prime Minister Rasmussen and Norwegian Prime Minister Stoltenberg, urging tolerance and respect for all faiths and for freedom of the press.

We appreciate the responsible statements made by officials such as Secretary General Ihsanoglu of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Jordan's King Abdullah, and the joint statement by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Spanish Prime Minister Zapatero, calling for calm.

We welcome similar statements that prominent Islamic community leaders, such as Iraq's Ayatollah Sistani and Bosnia's Mustafa Cerić, have made. We also welcome the joint statement made by UN Secretary General Annan, Secretary General Ihsanoglu and EU High Representative Solana.

As Secretary Rice stated yesterday, "There is no excuse for violence. We all need to respect each other's religions. We need to respect freedom of the press. But... with freedom of the press comes responsibility as well."

We urge those who are criticizing these cartoons to speak out against all forms of hate speech, including cartoons and articles throughout the Arab world that frequently espouse anti-Semitic or anti-Christian views.

Dialogue and respect for different points of view are critical, especially as we engage in discussions about deeply held and precious religious convictions.

The United States fully supports the Chair's proposal to hold a special meeting, which we believe should focus not only on the immediate issue at hand, but should deal with the wider issues of freedom of expression and appropriate ways of countering intolerance in society. We support the Chair's plan to invite the Mediterranean Partners Group, the three Personal Representatives on tolerance and the Representative on Freedom of the Media.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.